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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken in Washington state to investigate voting behavior on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was approved by Washington state voters in 1972. Specifically, research objectives were to determine who was for or against the ERA, to assess the nature of objections to the ERA, and to consider implications of the ERA for family relationships. A random sample of over 800 Washington state residents was interviewed by telephone in December 1972. Information was obtained on respondents' age, sex, marital status, occupation, education, family size, political and religious affiliation, and vote (or attitude) regarding the ERA. Findings indicated that men were more favorable toward the ERA than women; single and divorced respondents were more favorable than were married respondents; young were more favorable than old; white collar workers were more favorable than blue collar workers; and individuals with more education were more favorable than those with less education. Favorable decisions regarding the ERA appeared to be influenced by psychological variables (attitudes, values, self-concept) and by situational factors such as responsibilities of women and men in the home and outside employment. Additional research is suggested on the unequal division of labor in the home as an obstacle to sex equality and as a major reason for women's opposition to the ERA. (DB)

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THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT IN WASHINGTON STATE: AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF VOTING PATTERNS*

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The Equal Rights Amendment and Family Patterns:
Some Obstacles To Institutional Change

Advocates of equality between the sexes have long maintained that changes will have to be made in the political, economic, and family institutions before women can share equally with men the responsibilities and privileges in society. The problem has been to show how practices, policies, and attitudes of people within these institutions interact to impede or facilitate change in the relationship between the sexes. The women's movement has reached a stage where key aspects of its reform program have become matters of voter concern. At this stage of development it becomes easier to determine which segments of the population are in favor of change in the relationship between the sexes, and what the obstacles to such change might be.

The most concrete recent expression of the movement toward sex equality is the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). It has been approved by Washington State voters (1972) and is still being considered by a number of other states. This referendum would amend the Constitution to forbid any legislation on the basis of sex, which means that men and women would be treated equally before the law. To be sure, there is some doubt whether the ERA would bring about greater equality between the sexes. But the measure has taken on considerable symbolic importance for the women's movement and has generated strong reaction, both pro and con. Voting behavior on this issue, therefore, provides an opportunity to determine who is for or against the ERA, to assess the nature of the objections to the ERA, and to consider the implication of the family relationships for the ERA.

Sample and Procedures

A systematic sample of 1,066 telephone numbers was drawn. Utilizing directories for every community in the state of Washington, the telephone numbers were sampled in proportion to the population of the area covered by each directory. Telephone interviews were conducted during evening hours of the week of December 10, 1972. The person who answered the telephone was interviewed provided she (he) was 18 years of age or older.[1]

A contact was made at 920 of the 1,066 households sampled. Of those contacted, interviews were completed with 773, or 84 percent. Those who refused to be interviewed (147) and those not reached even after three or more call-backs (146) were mailed a copy of the questionnaire. These questionnaires were returned by 15 of the refusals and 48 of the no contacts (raising the completion rate for those contacted by phone to 86 percent). The analysis is based on 836 completed interviews and questionnaires. This represents 78 percent of the number taken from telephone books and 91 percent of those known to have been contacted. Inasmuch as females are somewhat more likely to be home or answer the phone, they outnumbered male respondents, 58 to 42 percent.

Information was obtained on the respondents age, sex, marital status, occupation, education, family size, political and religious affiliation, as well as on their vote (or attitude) regarding the ERA. Several other issues related to sex roles were also addressed in the survey: respondents attitudes toward abortion reform, public support of child (day care) centers, and employment of wives/mothers outside the home. Findings on some of these issues, although not the main focus of this analysis, will be used to supplement the results of the ERA analysis.

Findings

The question presented to the respondent on the ERA was phrased as follows: "It was proposed (in the November, 1972, general election) that a new article be added to the state constitution which provides that equality of rights and responsibilities shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex. Did you vote for or against this proposal?" If the respondent didn't vote, we asked whether they were generally favorable or unfavorable toward the amendment.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the ERA vote across various demographic and social characteristics of respondents.[2] There are few surprises in the results: single (i.e., never-married, divorced, and widowed) respondents are more favorable toward the ERA than are married respondents; young are more favorable than old; those in "white collar" occupations more so than "blue collar" workers; those with college education more favorable than those with less; and Democrats more in favor than Republicans or Independents. What these findings show is that respondents who would be expected to be more liberal, politically and philosophically, were found to be more likely to support the ERA.

We also found that more men are in favor of the ERA (66%) than are women (54%). This is consistent with the findings of several other recent studies: Chandler (1972), based on a national telephone survey, reported that 66% of men and 47% of women supported the ERA: Huber, Rexroat, and Spitze (1977) found a 58% to 43% difference between men and women, in their survey of Illinois residents; and a recent Gallup Poll reported that 63% of men and 54% of women favored the ERA (Gallup Poll Index, 1975).

Table 1 about here

It is surprising, however, how little of the variance in the ERA vote is explained by these demographic variables. Our regression analysis (Table 2) shows that these antecedent variables account for only 9 percent of the men's vote on the ERA and 13 percent of the women's vote. This suggests that perhaps the important antecedent variables to issues dealing with sex roles are psychological, such as, attitudes, values, and self-conceptions. Huber, et al. (1977) came essentially to the same conclusion in their analysis of attitudes toward the ERA: "[Our findings indicate that] respondents' views of the ERA are determined more by their hopes and fears about the consequesnces than by their sociodemographic attributes" (p. 13).

Table 2 about here

This suspicion gains support in our analysis of the answers to several follow-up questions. We asked respondents to state their main reasons for voting for or against the ERA. The responses were content analyzed and coded into a number of categories. Those voting in favor of the ERA almost uniformly gave as a reason their belief in "equal pay for equal work," or "all people should be equal." But the reasons given for voting against the ERA were more diverse (Table 3). Women's responses are especially relevant here since more of them voted against the ERA than did men, and over twice as many women than men gave reasons for being against the ERA.

In examining the objections to the ERA, we were struck by two main themes reflected in the nine response categories. One theme deals with the perceived "naturalness," or desireability of sex differences, and is evident in such comments as "women's place is in the home," "male/female differences should be maintained," and "women shouldn't take jobs away from men." This theme, reflected in response categories 1-6, accounts for 56 percent of the negative responses

of women. The second theme deals with the utility or efficacy of the ERA in bringing about changes that would benefit women. Two categories of objection reflect this idea and account for 35 percent of the negative responses: "The ERA would make things harder for women," and "The ERA is too vague; its meaning and implications for women are not clear."

Table 3 about here

These comments suggest two explanations for women's opposition to the ERA. One deals with sex-role socialization, the other with the perceived relative costs/rewards of the ERA for women. Conceptions of what constitutes "natural" or desirable behavior for males and females are part of the sex role stereotyping which is internalized early in the process of socialization as boys and girls develop gender identities. Even though sex-role stereotypes and gender identities may be as strongly held by males as females (they may even be more strongly held, since there are stronger sanctions against boys expressing "feminine" characteristics than there are against girls behaving like boys, cf. Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974), there are several reasons why sex-role socialization may be more of an obstacle to sex equality for women than men. There is more pressure toward obedience, responsibility, and nurturance in the socialization of girls, and more emphasis on the development of achievement and independence in boys. As a result, girls and women are more dependent, suggestible, noncompetitive, and responsible (cf. Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Janis and Field, 1959; and Walker and Heyns, 1962). These are personality characteristics which are more compatible with the maintenance of the status quo than with striving for change, even if change is perceived to be to one's

advantage. On the other hand, creativity and intelligence in women has been consistently found to be associated with socialization which emphasized "masculine" behavior, such as being a "tomboy" (Baumrind, 1972; Helson, 1965). As a result, the Equal Rights Amendment may be perceived as more of a threat by women to their self-conceptions than by men.

But there is another reason why women might consider the ERA more of a threat than men. The ERA is more consequential for women's roles than for men's. If the ERA becomes law, it is not likely to drastically alter the behavior patterns and occupational orientations of men. To be sure, the movement toward sex equality might put greater pressure on men to participate more in running the household and raising children, and perhaps there will be greater competition with women for occupational positions. But, equality has more drastic implications for women. Those who consider their main roles (and purpose in life) as mothers and housewives would be threatened with occupational obsolescence, and pressured to consider other careers. A number of social observers and advocates for sex equality are pointing out that motherhood and housekeeping roles are rapidly becoming obsolete. On the one hand, the threat of overpopulation is shifting the emphasis to smaller families (which modern birth control technology and more liberal abortion laws is making easier to achieve). On the other hand, science (and smaller families) has reduced housekeeping chores over the years. What this means then, as Bernard suggests (1970), is that a re-evaluation of women's roles is not only desirable, but it is necessary and inevitable.

But, typically, occupational groups fight for survival when threatened with obsolescence. Binstock recognizes this as a source of resistance to sex equality when she states:

> "We thus face the need to demand that the ancient and honorable occupation of motherhood fall into disrepute, and that women commit themselves to other occupations. Women must be 'liberated' to enjoy the fruits of other occupations, whether they want to be or not (1972:p. 100, emphasis added)."

The more negative vote of women on the ERA, then men, suggests that a substantial number of them may be threatened by the amendment, especially those who are unemployed, more poorly educated, and have children. We also found a smaller proportion of women voting for the liberalization of abortion laws (50 percent) than men (65 percent)--another measure which has been strongly advocated by feminist groups (i.e., "giving women the right to control their bodies"), and one which could be interpreted as threatening the maternal role.[3]

The Cost of Full and Partial Equality

In cold exchange terms, the cost of sex equality may be perceived as higher than the promised rewards. A number of privileges and disadvantages which women have had vis-a-vis men would have to be relinquished. Baumrind (1972), who has argued eloquently for sex equality, points to some of its costly aspects for women:

> "In order to achieve equality with men, women will have to relinquish those privileges which they are now offered and accept in compensation for their dependent status. Women are exempt from the draft. They leave it to men to take the initiative in

> heterosexual arrangements...They accept alimony. In work situations they benefit from the difficulty men have in behaving in competitive rather than courtly fashion...and are granted favors on the basis of their sex rather than their merits" (p.193).

Another advantage that women have is that many of them (at least married women) have a choice whether to be employed or not. Therefore, a complete commitment to a job or a career is not required. Even those who choose a job or career know that it is a choice which they can abandon. This is not to deny that many women are in the labor force because they have no choice in supporting themselves and their families. We simply mean to say that women in our society typically have more choice in the matter of employment than do men.

Full equality may be costly for women, but there are obvious rewards which make the pursuit worthwhile. Partial equality is even more costly. It may be the perception of the ERA as contributing to <u>partial equality</u>, by increasing the pressure on women to seek paid employment, yet leaving the domestic situation relatively unchanged and inhibitory to her pursuit of a career, that is reflected in comments 8 and 9 in Table 3.

If women's primary responsibilities have been for housekeeping and child care, then the family institution is not organized in a manner to facilitate women's participation in paid employment on a basis comparable with men. One illustration of this comes from the Soviet Union where women have been socialized to work and even strongly pressured to do so,

18 percent physically able women aged 16-54 (excluding students) remain outside the labor force (Field, 1968, pp. 14-45). Only about one-third of the professional, administrative, governmental and labor union positions are held by women and the proportion at the higher administrative levels is much less than that. Although considerable progress has been made there toward day care services, the wife still carries a heavy, time-consuming set of household tasks with little help from her husband. Field (1968, p. 45) reports that the typical U.S.S.R. woman devoted an average of 5 hours, 10 minutes daily to housework and self-care compared to 2 hours and 43 minutes by men. The average woman had 1 hour and 43 minutes free time compared to 3 hours, 9 minutes for men. Employed women devoted more than twice as much time to housework and self-care as did men and had less than half the amount of free time available to men.

In the United States, a recent Women's Bureau analysis (1971, p. 14) disclosed that wives employed more than 30 hours weekly averaged 5 hours of housework daily compared to 1.6 hours daily at household tasks by husbands. The average work week for men and women was about the same (employment and household tasks combined) 63 for women, 64 for men. However, nonemployed women averaged an eight hour day, men during the work week averaged 9.6 hours while the fully employed wife worked a 13 hour day.

The picture which emerges is that the average man, after working eight hours or more daily is willing to add to his responsibilities only a small proportion of the household and child care duties that must be performed. In the U.S. it averages 1.6 hours. Although the data are not precisely comparable, the husband in the metropolitan centers in the U.S.S.R. averaged about the same amount of time at household tasks as the American husbands. Therefore, the wife, if she chose full-time employment, added

an average of five hours of home-centered work onto her eight hour day. In this institutional milieu it is not surprising that over half of American wives are not employed, and of those who are, some one-third are employed part-time. For those who take employment, many find the combination of work responsibilities too costly. In 1970, 6.5 million women who had been employed, left employment. This was about 21 percent of those in the labor force that year. Half of these cited home and school responsibilities as the reasons (Women's Bureau, 1971, p. 21).

This perspective on family division of labor is useful, likewise, in explaining why the major influx of women has been into relatively low level positions. Epstein has shown that during the period 1940 to 1964, the proportion of grade school principalships held by women declined sharply from 55 percent in 1928 to 38 percent in 1968. "Women held only 38 percent of all professional and technical positions in October, 1966, compared with 45 percent in 1940" (Epstein, 1971, p. 10). During this period in which the proportion of married women employed increased dramatically from 15 percent in 1940 to 41 percent in 1970, the largest increases came in the "clerical and kindred workers" occupational category, rather than in the professional and managerial positions. Although part of the reason for this lack of increase in the more demanding occupations may be due to sexual discrimination in hiring practices, some of it may be the result of women being handicapped by domestic obligations. Women who devoted an average of five hours daily to household tasks were perhaps not eager or in a good position to take a professional or a managerial position which would require evening and/or weekend commitments.

Conclusion

The Equal Rights Amendment has brought into sharper focus a number of the problems facing sex equality in America. Our survey of Washington State residents indicates that the more poorly educated, unemployed, married women who are most opposed to the ERA. This supports earlier claims that a major obstacle to bringing about changes in the status of women, will be the opposition of women (Bernard, 1973; Bristock, 1972). It should be remembered, however, that the ERA was approved in Washington State, and that a majority of women who voted were in favor of it. But, since 1972 the opposition to the ERA has become more organized and, not surprisingly, it is coming primarily from women and not men.

The two explanations we have offered for women's opposition to the ERA--sex role socialization and an assessment of the ERA's cost/reward ratio for women, led us to a consideration of the institutional supports for the maintenance of traditional sex roles, especially as these are found in the contemporary institution of the family. We conclude that changes will have to occur in the family to enable changes in the economic and political institutions toward sex equality. In this regard, the considerable attention which has been directed toward sex role socialization has already produced noticeable changes toward a single standard in that area (such as the increasing use of "non-sexist" literature in public schools). Our focus has been mainly on the division of labor in the home as an obstable to sex equality and a reason for women's opposition to the ERA. Without changes in family responsibilities and domestic obligations women may perceive more loss than gain in such legal provisions as the ERA, since they may increase expectations for employment outside the home without alleviating the women's lot at home.

It is clear that attitudes toward sex roles, family roles, and work roles are changing toward a more egalitarian model (see for example, Mason, et al, 1976 , for changes in U.S. Women's sex-role attitudes from 1964-1974). It is also becoming clear that family and labor force roles are interdependent, and that equality in the occupational sphere is moving faster than it is in the family sphere. We have speculated in this paper that it is this discrepancy which is creating some unique stresses and straining for women in comtemporary American society contributing to their objections regarding the Equal Rights Amendment.

Footnotes

1. The use of telephone directories as a sample source has certain limitations. In 1970, 91 percent of Washington households had telephones (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1972). Those households without phones are most likely to be of lower socio-economic status. An unknown percent of households have unlisted numbers. These households are most likely to be of middle and upper income status (Leuthhold and Scheele, 1971).
2. The analysis presented here is only with regard to the reported vote on the ERA. Our examination of the attitudes toward the ERA of those who didn't vote revealed that the pattern was the same as for those who voted, but in each comparison it was somewhat more strongly in support of the ERA. This may be the effect of social desirability.
3. In November, 1970, the state of Washington by vote of the public adopted one of the most liberal abortion laws in the United States. In the present collection of data (November, 1972) respondents were asked the following questions: "I would like to ask you about a proposal to legalize abortions in Washington State placed on the ballot by the legislature as a referendum in the 1970 general election. Did you vote for/against this proposal?" For those who didn't vote in that election, didn't vote on the referendum or couldn't remember how they voted, the additional question was asked: "Although you (did not vote/are not sure about having voted), I would still like to ask how you feel about the legalization of abortions in Washington. Do you feel generally favorable or unfavorable?"

The results presented here are for the combined vote and attitude toward the liberalization of abortion.

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TABLE 1 Vote on ERA by Selected Characteristics of Respondents

	MEN'S VOTE			WOMEN'S VOTE		
	FOR	AGAINST	N	FOR	AGAINST	N
Marital Status:						
Married	64%	36%	224	49%	51%	243
Single, Widowed or Divorced	75	25	52	63	37	124
Age:						
Under 35	72	28	87	56	44	86
35-44	66	34	44	58	42	86
45-59	64	36	87	56	44	99
60+	59	41	59	48	52	95
Woman's (Wife's) Employment Status:						
Employed	64	36	89	60	40	206
Not Employed	67	33	188	47	53	160
Woman's (Wife's) Occupation:						
Blue Collar	50	50	10	54	46	28
Lower White Collar	62	38	52	59	41	114
Professonal	74	26	27	64	36	64
Man's (Husband's) Occupation:						
Blue Collar	58	42	36	38	62	37
Lower White Collar	58	42	117	49	51	102
Professonal	75	25	113	56	44	97
Education:						
High School or less	57	43	103	48	52	185
College	72	28	172	61	39	178
Political Preference:						
Democrat	72	28	88	63	37	133
Independent or Other	60	40	129	48	52	141
Republican	71	29	55	51	49	86
Total (Voting)	66%	34%	277	54%	46%	367
Total (Sample)			335			475

* The reason the Ns vary across variables is because "Refusals," "Don't Know," "Didn't Vote" and other such responses were not included in the tabulations.

TABLE 2 Regression Analysis on Equal Rights Amendment

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	MALES MULTIPLE R	MALES BETA	FEMALES MULTIPLE R	FEMALES BETA
CHURCH ATTENDANCE	.085	-.08	.013	-.03
AGE	.180	-.22	.192	-.12
MARITAL STATUS	.180	.00	.208	.18
WOMAN'S OCCUPATION	.187	.05	.223	.07
MAN'S OCCUPATION	.282	.20	.252	.14
NO. OF CHILDREN	.305	-.14	.300	-.17
EDUCATION	.306	.02	.354	.26*
POLITICAL PREFERENCE **	.306	.01	.359	.06
	R^2 = .094		R^2 = .129	

* $p \leq .05$

** The coding on this variable was as follows: 1=Republican; 2=Independent; 3=Democrat.

TABLE 3 Reasons Given For Voting Against ERA

	MEN	WOMEN
1. Traditional division of labor (women in the home) as natural order of things	12%	19%
2. ERA would lead to family breakups	7	1
3. Support traditional sex roles: competition with men is unfeminine, male/female differences should be maintained	10	16
4. ERA would lead to gay marriages, women being drafted, unisex bathrooms, and other such forms of moral decay.	17	8
5. Women shouldn't take jobs away from men.	5	4
6. There are jobs women physically can't or shouldn't do.	14	8
7. ERA is unnecessary, women are already equal.	14	9
8. ERA would make things harder for women.	12	15
9. ERA too vague, meaning and implications not clear	9	20
N =	66	142